

**JOSEF HELFENSTEIN, DIRECTOR OF THE MENIL COLLECTION,
TO BECOME DIRECTOR OF KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL**

HOUSTON, TX, June 30, 2015 — Janet Hobby, President of the Board of Trustees of the Menil Collection, today announced that the institution's long-serving director, Josef Helfenstein, has accepted the opportunity to become director of the Kunstmuseum Basel and is expected to leave the Menil in late 2015, after a highly successful twelve-year tenure.

"The Trustees have accepted Josef Helfenstein's decision with deep gratitude for all that he has accomplished here in Houston, and with sincere congratulations on an opportunity that we know is close to his heart," Janet Hobby said. "It will be difficult to say good-bye to such an extraordinary leader, but we know that Josef leaves the Menil in an exceptionally strong and stable position, poised for the new accomplishments that he helped the Board envision."

Josef Helfenstein stated, "I naturally feel torn by this decision, which separates me from a museum I will always love, while taking me away from a city I have embraced as a second home. Nothing could have drawn me away, except for this opportunity to return to Switzerland and lead the Kunstmuseum Basel, which for me is the culmination of a career. I thank the Board of the Menil and the people of Houston for having allowed me to serve them for this past twelve years and look forward to assisting in the transition to new leadership."

Janet Hobby announced that the Board of Trustees is beginning to implement plans to conduct an international search for the next director.

Josef Helfenstein assumed his duties at the Menil Collection in January 2004, managing all aspects of the institution's operations and development and directing its curatorial program. Under his leadership, the Menil's annual attendance doubled, the value of the endowment grew by almost 54 percent, and more than 1,000 works of art were added to the collection.

Among the acquisitions were significant groups of works by artists including Trisha Brown, Vija Celmins, Walter De Maria, Suzan Frecon, Robert Gober, Michael Heizer, Jasper Johns, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Max Neuhaus, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Richard Tuttle, Cy Twombly, and Kara Walker. The holdings of Surrealism—a significant concentration within the Menil Collection—grew with the acquisition of important works by Max Ernst, René Magritte, Meret Oppenheim, and Wols. Generous bequests from David Whitney and William Stern added works by artists including Lynda Benglis, Donald Judd, Brice Marden, Ed Ruscha, and Andy Warhol; and through a gift from Edmund Carpenter and Adelaide de Menil, the Menil acquired more than 100 invaluable photographs documenting the people and events of the Civil Rights movement.

Josef Helfenstein collaborated with the Board of Trustees to initiate a strategic plan for the institution, leading to a 2009 master site plan for the 30-acre campus and more recently to the \$110 million Campaign for the Menil. With almost 80 percent of its goal already achieved, the Campaign is adding to the endowment while funding the development of the Menil Drawing Institute (the first facility of its kind in the United States, now under construction), a new utilities building, a much-needed and now open bistro on campus, and the expansion and enhancement of green space to make the campus more open and inviting. Josef Helfenstein also guided the adaptation of the Menil's Byzantine Fresco Chapel into a new venue for long-term, site-specific art installations, beginning with *The Infinity Machine* (2015) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller.

Notable exhibitions that Josef Helfenstein personally organized during his tenure have included *Experiments with Truth: Gandhi and Images of Nonviolence* (which became the centerpiece of a citywide public consideration of the legacy of Gandhi); *Nice. Luc Tymans*; *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926-1938* (with The Museum of Modern Art and the Art Institute of Chicago); *Walter De Maria: Trilogies*; *Klee and America*; *Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboards and Related Pieces*; and *Kurt Schwitters: Color and Collage*. Other important exhibitions undertaken during his tenure included the international initiative *The Progress of Love* (with the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, and the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, St. Louis); *Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible*; *Lee Bontecou: Drawn Worlds*; *Richard Serra Drawing: A Retrospective*; *Cy Twombly: Treatise on the Veil*;

Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave; and form, color, illumination: Suzan Frecon painting.

In 2010, Josef Helfenstein and the Board of Trustees initiated the project to publish the catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Jasper Johns, under the auspices of the Menil Drawing Institute. The project is scheduled for completion in 2016. Also in 2010, the Menil Collection and Yale University Press published the book *Art and Activism: Projects of John and Dominique de Menil*, the result of research, documentation and writing initiated and overseen by Josef Helfenstein.

Born in Lucerne, Switzerland, Josef Helfenstein earned his Ph.D. from the University of Bern and began his career in museums in 1983 at the Kunstmuseum Bern, where he served both as associate director and as chief curator of the institution's prints and drawings department and Paul Klee Foundation. A recognized expert on the work of Klee, he inaugurated the project for the artist's 9-volume catalogue raisonné. In 2000, he relocated to the United States to assume a dual post at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, as director of the university's Krannert Art Museum and Kinkead Pavilion and professor in the School of Art and Design.

About the Menil Collection

A legacy of the late philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened to the public in 1987. Housed in the first United States building designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, the main museum anchors a 30-acre "neighborhood of art," as the late architectural historian Reyner Banham described the Menil campus. Sharing this park-like enclave with bungalows, great live oaks, and outdoor sculpture are the Cy Twombly Gallery (also by Renzo Piano); a site-specific work by Minimalist pioneer Dan Flavin that has transformed Richmond Hall, built in 1930 as a grocery store, into what the Boston Globe has likened to a "cathedral and carnival"; and Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *The Infinity Machine* at the Byzantine Fresco Chapel, now a venue for long-term installations by contemporary artists. Presenting regular rotations of artworks from the growing permanent collection, the Menil also organizes special exhibitions throughout the year; presents a full calendar of lectures, gallery

talks, film screenings, and other public programs; publishes scholarly books; and conducts pioneering research in the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, from 11a.m. until 7p.m., and closed Mondays and Tuesdays,. Admission is free of charge.

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